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SUGGESTIONS FOR CURING AND SMOKING TURKEYS.

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In studies by the Bureau of Animal Industry of methods for curing and smoking turkeys, progress has been made, but several important problems remain to be solved. Generally speaking, definite recommendations are not justified at this time. Pending the development of more specific information, the following suggestions are offered for the benefit of persons who may wish to undertake the preparation of smoked turkey on a small scale.

Turkeys to be used for curing and smoking should be well fattened, equal to U. S. Prime or Special grade. They should be subjected to the usual overnight fasting period (with access to water), then bled, brained, and carefully picked dry, or the feathers removed by the slack-scald method in water heated to 126° F. Care should be taken not to break the skin in the dressing and handling process. Birds with badly torn skin should be rejected. The full scald is undesirable since the skin is more likely to be injured when this method is used. Immediately after being picked, the birds should be drawn, removing all the viscera, and then chilled to a temperature of 30° to 40° F. In preparation for curing, the head, neck, and feet are then removed, leaving the body cavity open at both the fore and rear ends with an unobstructed passageway in between the two ends. The removal of the tendons in the leg is suggested to provide for better penetration of the curing ingredients into the meat of that portion of the bird.

A suitable curing mixture consists of 6 pounds of salt, 3 pounds of sugar, and 2 ounces of saltpeter dissolved in 4-1/2 gallons of water. This pickle contains approximately 13 percent of salt and has a salinometer reading of about 70° at a temperature of 38° F. Experience has shown that about four times this indicated quantity of pickle is required to cover 100 pounds of moderately large, drawn turkeys when packed carefully in a 50-gallon barrel.

The drawn turkeys should be packed carefully and close together in a suitable container, such as a crock or a clean, well-soaked, odorless hardwood barrel, and weighted down with a clean board and brick or stone so they will not float when the curing solution is added. Then pour the solution over the turkeys until they are covered with a slight excess of liquid. It is important that the temperature of both the meat and the pickle be approximately 38° F. when the curing process is begun and be kept at that point throughout the curing period. At weekly intervals the turkeys should be removed from the container and repacked in order to remix the pickle and to insure that it will come in contact with all parts of the birds.

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Depending on the weight of the turkeys the meat should be sufficiently cured in from 2 to 4 weeks to be removed from the pickle and prepared for smoking. It is suggested that the individual turkey remain in cure not less than 1-1/4 days per pound of weight after removal of all viscera and the head, neck, and feet; probably 1-1/2 days per pound would be a good standard to follow.

The cured turkey should be washed in warm water, hung up until dry, and then smoked, using hardwood, until a desirable brown color has developed. Recent work indicated that a smokehouse temperature of 135° to 140° F. is more effective in producing desirable color than lower temperatures. During the smoking process the turkey should be hung by either legs or wings in such a way as to provide for maximum exposure of skin as well as an opportunity for further drainage of curing fluid, especially from the body cavity. Several hours in hardwood smoke may give sufficient flavor, although some persons may prefer to smoke the meat longer, even to the extent of having a fire under it 8 to 10 hours each day for 3 to 4 days. However, in addition to other effects, smoking also causes dehydration, and therefore long-continued smoking may result in the concentration of salt in the meat to a point where it becomes objectionable.